

# **South Carolina's Response to Intervention**

## **Family Guide to Intervention**

**October 2011**

## The Importance of Partnerships

Families and schools share a common goal for students to learn and to have healthy, positive, caring experiences and grow up to become capable young adults who contribute and participate in their communities. Students get the most out of every learning experience when the adults in their lives form partnerships. The **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** and the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement ACT (IDEA 2004)** require more accountability for schools to provide high quality instruction for *all students*. Schools can't do this alone. Families and school staff must work together to make decisions in the best interest of students.

The objective of the guidance document is to inform families about the RTI process and how it may operate in schools.

## What is Response to Intervention (RTI)?

**Response to Intervention** is a process schools use to help students that are not making sufficient progress toward their learning goals. For RTI to be effective, families and educators need to work together. They need to discover what works for students and what may contribute to them not meeting grade level expectations. Families and educators must collaborate and communicate to ensure that quality instruction is based on student need.

When a school identifies a student not performing at a satisfactory level or projected rate of learning, the school must take a scientific approach to find and use effective instructional strategies based on student need. RTI requires school staff to critically evaluate classroom instructional and behavior programs. Teachers must deliver research-supported instruction. The instruction needs to be differentiated or adapted to individual student needs. Differentiating instruction when needed increases the likelihood that students can be successful and make progress. One size fits all instruction does not work in a Response to Intervention multileveled instructional system.

## The Essential Components of Response to Intervention

RTI practices are not limited to a specific subject area of the school curriculum. The RTI process is designed to improve outcomes for all children in the academic area as well as in the area of behavior.

School staff members make consistent efforts to welcome families as partners and decision-makers in their child's education. **Collaboration** and communication between families and school staff is critical to promote effective instruction for all students.

- The school staff conducts school-wide **assessment** of academics and/or behavior for all students. This process, called **Universal Screening** is conducted at regular intervals (fall, winter, spring) to identify students who are in need of closer monitoring in the classroom and those in need of more intensive academic and behavior interventions.
- School staff provides instruction that occurs in levels, called **Tiered Instruction**. RTI generally consists of a three-tiered model of school supports that uses research-based academic and/or behavior interventions. Quality instruction in the classroom (**Tier 1**) is critical, but will not meet the needs of every student.
- School staff implements specific, **High Quality, Research-based Instruction and Interventions (Tier II or Tier III)** for students not meeting grade-level academic and behavior expectations

in the classroom. Students will receive more frequent progress monitoring and increased collaboration among parents, interventionists, classroom teachers, and other staff members. Each level is more individualized and intensive. Tier III interventions are not necessarily special education; however, if a disability is suspected, school staff informs parents of their procedural safeguards and initiates a referral to determine if the student meets **Section 504** or **special education (IDEA)** eligibility. For more information on eligibility for special education, refer to the State Board of Education Regulation 43-243. Students are not placed permanently in a tier of instruction and may move between tiers as needed. A student with a disability or with other identified special considerations may be served at any tier in the process based on individual needs. Students who need additional assistance do not need to go through each tier to receive the appropriate intervention.

- School staff continuously monitors student progress. The purpose of **Progress Monitoring** is to determine the effectiveness of each intervention and to make any modifications as needed and to identify student's specific difficulties. Students instructional and behavior needs are identified early to increase progress toward standards and grade level or age appropriate expectations.

### **Benefits of Response to Intervention**

RTI practices strengthen communication between home and school. Schools inform families frequently of the school's expectations for academic performance and behavior and of the child's progress. Families become more active and meaningful participants in the school's educational efforts.

A well-implemented, research-based RTI process ensures earlier, more focused help for students not meeting grade-level expectations and provides critical information about student instructional needs in order to create effective interventions. The process may provide a more accurate identification of students with early reading disabilities.

An RTI system also increases collaboration among school staff and assistance to teachers, and guides **professional learning** efforts with the goal of increasing student achievement through continual improvement of instruction.

### **What about RTI for Children with Disabilities Who Receive Special Education Services?**

When a student is suspected of being a child with a disability, a referral should be made immediately to consider starting the full and individual evaluation process. Using the RTI model as part of the evaluation process provides data to the evaluation group.

A Parent may request the **special education** evaluation process begin at any point during the RTI process. A request for a special education evaluation should be made in writing. The RTI process can continue during the evaluation process and may provide data to the school in responding to the parent's request.

If a student has an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**, the first step is to work with members of the **IEP team** to identify the appropriateness for the intervention strategies needed. The team may determine whether additional special education and or related services are required through reevaluation.

## **Response to Intervention: Questions Families/Parents Should Ask**

Families can make a difference in the outcomes for their children by asking questions to obtain the information necessary to make informed decisions about educational opportunities. Below are some questions to guide you as you learn more about RTI.

- Is the school district currently using an RTI process to provide additional support to students not meeting grade level expectations? If not, do they plan to?
- What screening procedures are used to identify students in need of intervention?
- What are my student's specific strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the types of data that will be collected to monitor student progress? How will that information be communicated to families?
- How do my student's scores compare with other children who are at the same grade level and age level?
- What materials and instructional methods are used in the classroom? How does the school know that the materials and instructional methods are research-based?
- Do the teachers and staff have special training in working with students who have academic and behavioral difficulties?
- How often do the different teachers and other school staff members share information with each other about student progress?
- How was it determined that my child might benefit from intervention in Tier II or Tier III instruction? Who is involved in that decision?
- What are the interventions and instructional programs being used? What research supports their effectiveness?
- Is the teacher or other person responsible for providing the interventions trained in using the intervention?
- For how many days each week is Tier II or Tier III instruction provided and for how many minutes each day?
- At what point in the RTI process are students who are suspected of having a disability referred for formal evaluation?

## **Important Tips to Remember**

- Keep a copy of your child's screening scores so that you can compare them with scores on future tests.

- Ask for a copy of the progress monitoring information on a regular basis so that you can track progress.
- Inform the school staff of your concerns.
- Parents may request that a formal evaluation be done at any time in the RTI process. If a disability is suspected, a letter of referral may be written to the school. Below is an example:

*Date*

*Dear Principal (Principal's name),*

*Please evaluate my child for a possible disability.*

*Thank you.*

*(Your name)*

When a school receives a letter, school officials are legally obligated to respond to the request. A meeting may be scheduled to explain the school's procedures and goals for individual evaluations. In addition, they may also inquire reasons for requesting the evaluation. This inquiry may not delay the school's decision to conduct the evaluation. The school district is not required to conduct a full and individual evaluation based on parent request but must provide the parent with Prior Written Notice to explain the reason that it will not conduct the evaluation.

Teachers may also make a referral for a formal evaluation. This referral should be based on proper process required from the Special Education policies within the district. The School Intervention Team and the appropriate information gathered for respective students should be included in this referral.

## **RTI Resources**

Parent Advocacy Brief: Parent's Guide to Response-to-Intervention, National Center for Learning Disabilities.

[www.LD.org](http://www.LD.org)

Response to Intervention: What Families and Educators Need to Know, Parents Reaching Out, New Mexico, Fall 2007.

[www.parentsreachingout.org/pdfs/english/education/edurti.pdf](http://www.parentsreachingout.org/pdfs/english/education/edurti.pdf)

Responsive Instruction: Refining Our Work of Teaching All Children, Virginia's Response to Intervention, A Guide for School Divisions, 2007.

[www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/studentsrvcs/rti\\_guidance\\_document.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/studentsrvcs/rti_guidance_document.pdf)

The Utah Special Educator, September 2007.

[www.updc.org/library/speducator/pdf.Sept.07.pdf](http://www.updc.org/library/speducator/pdf.Sept.07.pdf)

Council on Exceptional Children's Position on Response to Intervention.

[www.cecc.sped.org](http://www.cecc.sped.org)

## **RTI Vocabulary and Definitions**

**Assessment** is a broad term used to describe the collection of information about student performance in a particular area. Assessments can be formative or summative.

**Collaboration** means to work together, especially in a joint effort.

**Data-based Instruction** is an instructional approach in which student performance data is used to assess the effectiveness of the instruction and to make changes in instruction based on the data.

**IDEA** is the acronym for Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. Also referred to as IDEA 2004, this federal statute provides services to students with disabilities ages three through twenty-one. The legislation was originally passed in 1975 and the latest reauthorization was in 2004.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a written document that outlines the special education and related services specifically designed to meet the unique educational needs of a student with a disability. It is a written statement for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with IDEA 2004.

**Individualized Education Program Team (IEP Team)** is a group of individuals responsible for developing, reviewing, or revising an IEP for a student with a disability.

**Interventions** are instructional strategies used to enhance student learning based on student needs. Interventions are provided in addition to the classroom instruction. Interventions are characterized by increased length, focus, and frequency.

**No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a United States Act of Congress concerning the education of children in public schools. NCLB was originally proposed by the administration of George W. Bush immediately after he took office. The Act supports standards-based education reform, which is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education.

**Professional learning** is the process of increasing the professional capabilities of staff by delivering or providing access to training and educational opportunities.

**Progress Monitoring** is a scientifically-based practice that is used to assess student's academic performance and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Progress monitoring can be implemented with individual students or an entire class.

**Research-based Instruction** is research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and includes research that:

- Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment
- Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn
- Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators

- Is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls
- Ensures experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings
- Accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review."

**Response to Intervention** (RTI) is a system of academic and behavioral interventions designed to provide early, effective assistance to struggling students. Schools implement research-based interventions and conduct frequent progress monitoring to assess student response and progress. When students do not make progress, they receive increasingly more intense interventions.

**Section 504** is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination based upon disability. Section 504 is an anti-discrimination, civil rights statute that requires the needs of students with disabilities to be met as adequately as the needs of the non-disabled are met.

**Special Education** is defined by law as specially designed instruction and related services to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability; services are provided at no cost to the parents and can be provided in many different settings.

**Standard** is the broad expectation for an area of knowledge in a given domain and may include an expectation of the degree to which a student expresses his or her understanding of that knowledge.

**Tiered Instruction** refers to levels of instructional intensity within a leveled instructional model.

**Universal Screening** establishes an academic and behavioral baseline and is used to identify learners who need additional support.

## **Parent Participation: What Teachers Need to Know**

Involving parents at all phases is a key aspect of a successful RTI program. As members of the decision-making team, parents can provide a critical perspective on students, thus increasing the likelihood that RTI interventions will be effective. For this reason, schools must make a concerted effort to involve parents as early as possible, beginning with instruction in the core curriculum. This must be done by notifying parents of student progress within the RTI system on a regular basis. Districts and schools should provide parents with information about its RTI program and be prepared to answer questions about RTI processes. The following should be included in this information:

- Explain to ALL parents how RTI is being implemented as part of the school's general education initiative.
- Inform parents about any new instructional practices that will be used in the classroom and how the student's progress will be monitored.
- Ensure that families know how the school will communicate and how they can request information or talk to the teachers.
- Notify parents about what they can do at home to reinforce what is happening at school.
- Inform families about the additional instruction or interventions (Tier II), what academic or behavioral areas are being included, what the parents can do at home, and how progress or problems will be communicated.
- Consider family diversity (culture, education, language and poverty) when designing methods of communication.
- Explain the data.
- Communicate and celebrate success.
- Educate and support the family in understanding their child's present level of performance and in understanding the special education process, if their child has been referred for an evaluation to determine special education eligibility.
- Be sensitive to family concerns about their child's having a disability and quickly respond to questions and requests for evaluation. Do not try to limit these discussions to students receiving Tier II interventions.
- Remind school personnel and parents that special education is only one of the options for Tier III interventions.